

THE HUMAN AND THE NON-HUMAN IN THE PROSE OF LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI AND FILM OF BÉLA TARR

DOI: 10.17234/SEC.36.7

Original scientific paper

Received:

15th April 2024

Accepted:

15th August 2024

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László Krasznahorkai and Béla Tarr are contemporary Hungarian authors known for their long-lasting collaboration. In the late stage of his film-directing career (1988 – 2011), Tarr adapted several Krasznahorkai's novels, while the screenplay of his last film – *The Turin Horse* (*A torinói ló*, 2011) – was written by Krasznahorkai himself. The traces of Krasznahorkai's style are evident in Tarr's films not only on the level of themes and motives, but also on the level of form. Some of the main characteristics of their collaborative work include setting up an apocalyptic tone, slow flow of time, and frequent animalistic motives (e.g. cow herds grazing in the opening scene of *Sátántangó*, a taxidermied whale as the central motif in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, a horse as a character in *The Turin Horse*). What makes both of these authors distinctive is their interest in nonhuman subjects, namely the animals. Therefore, this article will focus on their two apocalyptic works – Krasznahorkai's novella *Animalinside* (2011) and Tarr's *The Turin Horse* – starting from the assumption that Krasznahorkai uses “animal narrators” in *Animalinside*, while Tarr aims to depict the inner life of an animal in *The Turin Horse* (Bernaerts et al. 2014). Their shared stylistic and formal characteristics result in similar effects for the reader/viewer and are the product of a “double dialectic”: empathy with non-human subject and estrangement, that is, a subversion of assumptions and expectations about animal subjects on one hand, and the subversion of human “experientiality” on the other (Bernaerts et al. 2014; Fludernik 1996). Starting from these assumptions, the article will consist of comparative analysis of narrative techniques in these two media, i.e., in the aforementioned novella and film, which generate similar effects and serve the same idea: challenging anthropocentric worldviews.

Keywords: *László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr, non-human narrators, cognitive narratology, animal studies*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of non-human narration has become a subject of increasing interest in cognitive narratology over the past fifteen years. As the sciences dedicated to studying animal behavior are being developed, and in the context of the climate crisis with the issue of biodiversity loss becoming more prominent, literary narratives are increasingly leaning towards non-human narrators in various forms: rocks, plants, parasites, machines...

Examples of non-human narrators can be found in the works of two contemporary Hungarian authors — writer László Krasznahorkai and film director Béla Tarr. These authors are known for their long-standing collaboration: in his mature phase as a director (1988–2011), Tarr adapted several of Krasznahorkai's novels (such as *Sátántangó* from 1985, and *The Melancholy of Resistance* from 1989), and the screenplay for his final film, *The Turin Horse* (*A torinói ló*, 2011), was written by Krasznahorkai. Krasznahorkai's influence in Tarr's films is noticeable both thematically and formally. Tarr's mature phase, marked by his collaboration with Krasznahorkai, features constant elements typical of Krasznahorkai's prose: an apocalyptic tone, slow passage of time, and numerous animal motifs. The film *The Turin Horse* represents the pinnacle of Krasznahorkai's influence and serves as the climax of Tarr's mature phase. A distinct characteristic of both authors is their focus on non-human subjects, particularly animals: Krasznahorkai's novella *Animalinside* (2010) uses an "animal narrator," which places it within the genre of "animal autobiography," while Tarr's film *The Turin Horse* can be interpreted as an attempt to depict the inner life of an animal (Bernaerts et al. 2014; Herman 2018). Both works exemplify non-anthropomorphic representations of consciousness in fictional animals through apocalyptic stories. The narrative techniques in both media produce similar effects on readers/viewers, reflecting a double dialectic: empathy with the non-human subject and a sense of defamiliarization, or the subversion of assumptions and expectations about the animal subject on one hand, and the subversion of human "experientiality" on the other (Fludernik 1996).

By reading and watching fictional life stories of non-human narrators, recipients are encouraged to reflect on aspects of humanity, questioning assumptions about the differences between the human and non-human. Consequently, this paper will be based on the analysis and comparison of narrative techniques in these different media, specifically in the aforementioned novella and film, which produce the same effects and serve the same purpose — reexamining anthropocentric worldviews. Beginning with a presentation of the theoretical framework for studying animal narratives developed by cognitive narratologists, the paper will attempt to present in detail several important

issues arising from recent narratological research. These issues are related to narratives in which animals take on the role of focalizers or active subjects. In the final part of the paper, these concepts will be applied to the two works mentioned above, which have not yet been analyzed through this theoretical lens.

ANIMAL NARRATIVES: FROM ANTHROPOMORPHIC PROJECTIONS TO ANIMAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

“Understanding how another sentient being experiences the world is,” as narratologist Marco Caracciolo notes, “both remarkably easy and extremely difficult” (Caracciolo 2014:486). Caracciolo’s conclusion applies to both interhuman and *non*-human understanding, but when it comes to another animal species, the process becomes significantly more complex due to not only cultural but also biological differences (e.g., different sensorimotor abilities). Perhaps precisely these obstacles contain the potential for literary and artistic endeavors of exploring unknown and unreachable realms.

Animal narrators have a long history in Western literary tradition. The first literary texts that a person encounters in early childhood are often narrated from an animal’s perspective, such as fables, fairy tales, and many other forms of children’s literature where animals continue to play prominent roles as characters and narrators even today. However, animals depicted in this way are interpreted within generic conventions, have stereotypical traits, and function as projections of human characteristics, most often serving a didactic purpose or providing a satirical commentary on human behavior. This approach to portraying animal characters reduces them to allegorical and symbolic representations, and as such, it cannot answer the famous question which, to paraphrase Thomas Nagel, is: What is it like to be an animal?

A departure from such early anthropomorphic projections began in the late eighteenth century, and did not become more noticeable until the twentieth century, when literary texts started to show a growing interest in animals as individual subjects. It is believed that this twentieth-century shift from a symbolic understanding of animals to an existential one occurred primarily under the influence of the theory of evolution, which addresses the biological continuity between humans and non-humans. In this context, narratologist Jan Alber highlights postmodern narratives that exhibit a high degree of “animalness” because they deconstruct the binary opposition of *human* – *nonhuman animal* (see Alber 2016:88). Consequently, literary animals are increasingly seen as conscious, individual subjects that exist outside the anthropocentric value system only from the twentieth century onwards, and thus they gradually become the subject of narratological studies.

Discussing the term “character” (*personnage* in French) in literary texts, Gérard Genette mentions in a footnote that “in fiction nothing prevents us from entrusting that role to an animal” (Genette 1980:244). His thought has been further developed by literary theorists and narratologists, both classical and contemporary, post-classical narratologists, who discuss the possibilities of animal narrators and focalizers. One of the early studies on this topic was authored by Theodore Ziolkowski (1983), who divided human-centric and canine-centric narratives about dogs from antiquity to modernity within the Western literary canon. Some of the contemporary scholars following this direction are William Nelles (2001), who wrote about homodiegetic animal focalization, Suzanne Keen (2011a), who analyzed the effects of narrative empathy, specifically empathy with animal characters in fiction, Lars Bernaerts and colleagues (2014), who published a foundational study on non-human narrators, and David Herman (2016, 2018), with his contributions to the study of animal autobiography.¹

The key questions that arise in the context of animal narratives are: (1) Is the experience of another species accessible to humans at all? (2) Can narrative texts provide us with insight into that experience? And, if they can, (3) what are the limits of human imagination in this endeavor? Caracciolo, one of the leading narratologists addressing such questions, argues that fiction only allows us to access this experience to a certain degree: humans can learn to associate certain animal behaviors with their emotional states, but the final picture remains too imprecise to fully and accurately depict the animal experience (2014:487). On the other hand, some ethologists and animal cognition experts argue that there is no such thing as emotions unique to humans, claiming that “we share all emotions with other species in the same way that we share virtually every organ in our bodies with them” (de Waal 2019). Still, regardless of how authentically non-human experiences can be portrayed, in order to determine to what extent a narrative text truly corresponds with the inner life of an animal, it is crucial to first examine the effects such texts have on readers.

¹ Based on narratological analyses of the non-human, a canon of literary texts featuring animal narrators has emerged. These texts, according to the mentioned narratologists, attempt to depict animal experience with varying degrees of fidelity. Some of the more frequently analyzed texts include: *The Plague Dogs* by Richard Adams, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* by Julian Barnes, *Heart of a Dog* by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot* by Robert Olen Butler, *The Dialogue of the Dogs* by Miguel de Cervantes, *A Report to an Academy*, *The Burrow*, *Investigations of a Dog*, and other stories by Franz Kafka, *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell, *Flush* by Virginia Woolf, and many others.

ANIMAL EXPERIENCE IN NARRATIVES: BETWEEN DEFAMILIARIZATION AND EMPATHY

Drawing from insights in cognitive narratology and affective studies, Alexa Weik von Mossner argues that narratives simulate experience by blurring the distinction between the reader's/viewer's real body and the fictional body (Weik von Mossner 2017:26). Mossner states that "storytelling plays a central role in memory formation and counterfactual thinking; it is what allows us to communicate events we have experienced or imagined to others, who can then in turn imaginatively simulate those events and therefore share our experience to some degree. (...) Functionally, the brain does not really differentiate between consciously constructed and consumed narratives and other, less conscious forms of narrativization" (ibid.:6).

As neuroscientist Jeffrey Zacks notes, whether we experience events in real life, watch them in a film, or hear about them in a story, "we build perceptual and memory representations in the same format." (Zacks 2014:110). Mossner extends Zacks' conclusion to the experience of reading literary texts, where narratives serve as "means for making sense of the world," whether it be the imaginary and fictional world or the real one in which we live (Weik von Mossner 2017:7). In this sense, it is important to distinguish between a scientific description of a phenomenon and a narrative. David Herman argues that while the former offers an objective description, unlike narrative, it does not allow us to imagine what the experience feels like (Herman 2007:3). Moreover, some psychological studies suggest that events we mentally simulate in response to a story can continue to influence our emotions, attitudes, and behaviors even after we have engaged with them (Mar et al. 2011 and D. Johnson et al. 2013, as cited in Weik von Mossner 2017:7).

But how does all this relate to narratives that attempt to simulate the inner world of a *non*-human animal? The conceptual framework for studying non-human narration was presented by Lars Bernaerts and colleagues in the 2014 text "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators." The authors develop their main idea on the assumption that a combination of narrative empathy and defamiliarization is an inherent feature of texts with non-human narrators, whether these are animals, objects, or undefined entities. Herman emphasizes that this work "established an important precedent for inquiry into narration by nonhuman agents, laying foundations for a narratology beyond the human more generally" (Herman 2018:174).² The starting point of their text is that literature with

² Despite these contributions, drawing on social constructivism and the philosophy of Bruno Latour (1991/1993), the authors refer to both animals and inanimate objects as non-human

non-human narrative instances “can challenge readers’ familiarity with mental processes via their empathetic engagement with animal minds” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:69). Non-human narratives create effects on readers that need to be understood as a double dialectic based on the interplay of the oppositions *known–unknown* and *identical–otherness*, as well as the relationship between mimetic and anti-mimetic features of narrative. This double dialectic results from the intertwined relationships of empathy and defamiliarization on one side, and the subversion of human and non-human experiences on the other. Non-human narrators elicit the reader to project human experiences onto beings that typically do not possess that kind of mental perspective, a phenomenon summarized by the concepts of *empathy* and *naturalization* (ibid.). At the same time, readers must recognize the otherness of the non-human narrator, which can disrupt some of their assumptions about human life, meaning that such narratives produce an effect of defamiliarization and a disruption of human experience, i.e., denaturalization (ibid.).

The theoretical background upon which the authors build their research is, first and foremost, the concept of narrative empathy associated with narratologist Suzanne Keen. This concept posits that reading, watching, listening to, or imagining narratives that depict the situations and states of another active subject can lead a reader to share the subject’s emotions and adopt the subject’s perspective (Keen 2013). Furthermore, Bernaerts and colleagues connect narrative empathy with Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization, identifying it as a key characteristic of non-human narration. According to the authors, the first elaborate example of defamiliarization presented by Shklovsky is Tolstoy’s *Kholstomer*, a novella in which a horse serves as the intradiegetic narrator. “Shklovsky underscores the fact that the perspective of the horse changes the reader’s perception of the world as he knows it. In narratological terms, it is focalization as well as voice, characterization, and narrative evocation of fictional minds that collaborate in realizing this effect” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:73). The authors see defamiliarization as the effect literary texts produce on the reader, which consists of a process of questioning the

narrators, a stance that has attracted various criticisms. One of these critiques was formulated by Herman himself, who argues that such an equating of animals and objects can obscure “contrasting meanings that these kinds of beings have in the broader cultural ontologies in which they figure” (Herman 2018:174). For this reason, Herman distinguishes “narratology beyond the human” from the broader posthumanist project of questioning the centrality of the human and prioritizing everything that the human excludes, whether dealing with non-human animals or inanimate objects. He also references anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, who criticizes Latour because “the distinction Latour makes between humans and nonhumans ... fails to recognize that some nonhumans are selves” (Kohn, as cited in Herman 2018:174). In other words, such relativization overlooks the fact that, in the classification of the living world, humans belong to the animal kingdom.

reader's ideas of what is considered normal or predictable within a given genre or narrative situation. However, Shklovsky's formalist approach offers only a partial explanation. Therefore, Bernaerts and colleagues propose *narrative empathy* as a counterbalance to the concept of defamiliarization, defining it as an essential feature of non-human narration, where it is described as "imaginative process whereby readers temporarily adopt the perceptual, emotional, or axiological perspective of a fictional character" (ibid.).

Empathy for non-human narrators in non-human narratives is, in fact, a prerequisite for actualizing defamiliarization in the reading experience. One of the necessary conditions for evoking the reader's empathy, noted by Keen in graphic novels — and which, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to literary forms consisting solely of text — is the anthropomorphization of animal characters (Keen 2011b:136). In the context of cultural animal studies, anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism serve as starting points for analysis under the assumption that these worldviews/actions have negative effects on human–nonhuman relationships. Caracciolo warns of the paradox of depicting non-human experience, as it simultaneously involves appropriation on the level of language and criticism of anthropocentrism, which is inherent in human–nonhuman relationships (2014:485). However, it is important to note that anthropomorphization does not necessarily diminish the animal perspective; on the contrary, it can be useful when applied critically (Herman 2018:5–7).³ This leads to the conclusion that anthropomorphism is a necessary precondition for understanding the experience of another animal and activating the recipient's empathy, but only when applied critically, that is, when accompanied by an

³Fredrick Karlsson (2012) distinguishes two forms of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. The first is pragmatic, embodied anthropocentrism, which implies that we necessarily approach everything from a human perspective, with a much more chauvinistic value-theoretical anthropocentrism which is a possible, but not inevitable, consequence of describing the world according to standards shaped by manifested anthropocentrism. Anthropomorphism, on the other hand, can be psychological or cultural, depending on whether a human or human-like mental state is attributed to a non-human, and whether the understanding of human cultural groupings and practices is transferred to the study of relationships between non-human animals. As Kari Weil states, "anthropomorphism was a common practice in earlier times, under the Enlightenment any attribution of our own capacities or characteristics to animals was seen to conflict with the scientific and rational capacities that made us human. The urge to identify with and so to anthropomorphize another's experience, like the urge to empathize with it, has been even more recently criticized as a form of narcissistic projection that erases boundaries of difference" (Weil 2012:45). However, resistance to anthropomorphism can stray into what primatologist Frans de Waal calls *anthropodenial*, or "the a priori rejection of humanlike traits in other animals or animallike traits in us" (2016:32). This type of self-reflective anthropomorphism in ethological studies is called critical anthropomorphism because it helps in understanding the life of the animal, and conceptually, it is not significantly different from attempts to understand a person of another age, gender, sensory or motor abilities, and the like (Rivas and Burghardt 2011:11).

awareness of the animal's specificities.⁴

In addition to Bernaerts and colleagues, Miranda Anderson and Stefan Iversen have also addressed similar issues, demonstrating intersections between the concepts of defamiliarization and immersion, i.e. the reader's immersion/engagement with the narrative world. They point out that Shklovsky's concept has a broader range of functions than previously assumed (Anderson and Iversen 2018). The authors write that immersion can be understood as "transparently directing attention towards what has been referred to as the 'language-independent reality' that is presented by the fictional text" (Anderson and Iversen 2018:571). In the words of narratologist Erin James, immersion is the effect that refers to the phenomenon of the reader "imaginatively transporting" into "virtual environments that may or may not reflect those environments in which we read" (James 2015:25).

Non-human narratives thus reflect this dialectic of defamiliarization and empathy because "they implicitly and explicitly foreground strategies of distancing and identification" (Bernaerts et al. 2014:73–74). Since they open up the possibility of simultaneously recognizing similarity and otherness (e.g., the realization that a dog is both different from and similar to a human), stories narrated by non-human animals can destabilize anthropocentric worldviews: "By giving a voice to non-human animals and facilitating empathy, these narratives can place them on a continuum with humans, rather than constructing them as opposites" (ibid.:74).

Another aspect of the dialectic relates to so-called natural and unnatural narratology. If we use the term "natural" narratology introduced by Monika Fludernik, we can say that stories about non-human entities are narrativized through the projection of human experientiality, "holistic schemata known from real life" that "can be used as building stones for the mimetic evocation of a fictional world" (Fludernik 1996:28). However, since non-human narrators "seem to depart radically from human beings, the projection of human experientiality can only be one part of the reader's engagement with them" (Bernaerts et al. 2014:74). Furthermore, "while coming to grips with the non-human and artificial dimension of these narrators, the reader may be invited to consider important aspects of human existence, including the artificial nature of fiction itself" (Bernaerts et al. 2014:74). This disruption of ("natural") conventions in the relationship between the audience and the non-human narrator is central to so-called "unnatural narratology" (Alber

⁴ Alexandra Horowitz, an expert in canine cognition, notes an uncritical form of anthropomorphization of non-human animals in visual media and points out that dogs rarely get the chance to just *be dogs*. In films, they are presented as lovable, furry substitutes for humans (Horowitz 2018). This kind of anthropomorphization ranges from the simple attribution of human emotions and desires to dogs (cf. *Lassie* or *Benji*) to the inexplicable genre where dogs excel in professional human sports (*Air Bud* and *Soccer Dog*).

et al. 2010). Bernaerts and colleagues note that “in many cases we cannot understand non-human narration merely by applying familiar frames of reference. ‘Natural’ narratology stresses the importance of human experientiality, while ‘unnatural’ narratology stresses the anti-mimetic aspects of non-human narration” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:75). Therefore, Bernaerts and colleagues position the projection of non-human experientiality between these two poles. Specifically, non-human narrators use focalization, characterization, and the depiction of consciousness to evoke non-human experientiality. Non-human narration “cannot be reduced to the unnatural and the strange, since it is caught in a dialectic of empathy and defamiliarization, the familiar and the strange, human and non-human experience” (ibid.). However, it is important to recognize that this double dialectic of defamiliarization and empathy, highlighted by the authors, always occurs in a specific context, as non-human narration can serve various functions in narrative texts, such as satirical, didactic, or ethical ones. Alber outlines three key moments in the historical development of functions for animal narrators: animals first found their place as narrators in fables, where they served to mock human weaknesses; then, they gained popularity in the eighteenth-century Victorian novels of circulation with a didactic and ethical function (mainly dealing with human cruelty towards animals); and finally, in postmodernist texts, the similarities between humans and animals are emphasized, blurring the clear boundaries between them (Alber 2016:87). Bernaerts and colleagues note that one of the frequent ideological positions in non-human narratives is the objectification of animals by humans in an effort to maintain their own subjectivity or dominance.

UMWELT AND INTER-SPECIES RECOGNITION

In the context of contemporary narratology and its growing interest in the non-human, David Herman has made a significant contribution to the study of animal narratives. In his comprehensive book *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life*, Herman argues that previous analytical frameworks based on the Cartesian polarity between the *mind*, belonging to the inner sphere, and the *world*, which is external, should be replaced by a continuum that spans from “course-grained” to “fine-grained” attempts at depicting animal experiences (Herman 2018:138). This continuum ranges from animal allegories where “the specificity of the experiences of nonhuman animals is emptied out and replaced with experiences modeled after and imported from the human domain,” to texts that, through language, attempt to suggest “distinctive texture and ecology of nonhuman experiences,” evoking *what it is like* to be that animal (Herman 2011:162; Herman 2018:138). Herman uses the term *Umwelt*, borrowed from the philosopher and

biologist Jakob von Uexküll, to denote the study of narratives that depict the subjective experience of an animal in its lived environment. In this sense, “narrative affords a bridge between the human and the nonhuman (...) not merely by allegorizing human concerns via nonhuman animals or engaging in anthropomorphic projections, but also by figuring the lived, phenomenal worlds (...) of creatures whose organismic structure differs from our own” (Herman 2011:159). *Umwelt* refers to the environments of human or non-human animals “in the sense of its lived, phenomenal world, the world as it presents itself to that animal thanks to its sensorimotor repertoire” (Thompson according to Herman 2018:118).

All these premises raise the question: “To what extent can human-made artifacts such as stories reflect animal forms of cognition?” and “Aren’t they rather the product of the all-too-human imagination of their authors (and readers)?” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:76). These questions necessarily evoke discussions from phenomenology and philosophy of mind, specifically whether the consciousness of other animals is accessible to us. Philosopher Thomas Nagel, in his seminal essay *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*, argues that due to the limitations of our imagination, we cannot know how the world appears to creatures different from us in terms of bodily and sensorimotor capacities. In contrast, philosopher Daniel Dennett, as Herman points out, holds that both human and non-human minds are equally accessible to us. Drawing on this, Herman seeks to bridge such theories about “the radical inaccessibility of nonhuman minds,” arguing that “mind-ascribing acts (...) always unfold within particular arenas of practice, or discourse domains” (Herman 2018:212–213). A counter-argument of sorts is offered by J.M. Coetzee in his book *The Lives of Animals*, where the fictional character Elizabeth Costello suggests that experiences provided by literary texts can bring readers closer to paradoxical states, such as being dead or being an animal (Coetzee according to Bernaerts et al. 2014:76). However, what interests Nagel is not the power of human imagination itself but “its capacity to bridge the gap between the first-person approach to the mental (phenomenology) and the third-person, scientific approach (which is concerned with physical states of the brain)” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:76). Regarding experience itself, there is currently no scientifically valid way to prove that literary examinations of animal life are more than, as Bernaerts and colleagues put it, an “exercise of the imagination” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:76). It should, however, be noted that the impossibility of objectively understanding subjective experience is a problem that can be generalized to any intra-species encounter, even among humans. In this context, an interesting remark is made by Tessa Laird in her book *Bat*, where she cites an anecdotal example of inter-species recognition between a young, adopted bat named Archie and Richard Morecroft,

⁵ Morecroft wrote in more detail on his experiences of raising Archie the bat in *Raising Archie: The Story Of Richard Morecroft* in 1991.

the man who raised him.⁵ Describing their experience, Laird concludes: “Yet who is to say that there isn’t an internal homology or sympathy between spreading a wing membrane and stretching a human arm?” (Laird 2018:145). Moreover, such claims come not only from anecdotal examples but also from experts who study animals. Donald Griffin, an expert on animal consciousness and one of the first scientists to discover echolocation in bats, considers Nagel’s essay to display “a form of ‘paralytic perfectionism’, with its defeatist logic discouraging any attempt to step beyond species silos” (ibid.).

As mentioned in the introduction, literary and other artistic practices do not produce new scientific knowledge but engage with values and meanings embodied in human experience, as Mossner, Zacks, and Herman have emphasized. Defamiliarization and empathy play an important role in this process. Regardless of the artistic medium, narratives can create the illusion that recipients are experiencing the world from a non-human animal’s perspective, a psychological effect made possible by defamiliarization, i.e., a deviation from conventional connections with the world. Krasznahorkai’s short story collection *Animalinside* and Tarr’s film *The Turin Horse* are contemporary examples that draw attention to the reader’s projection onto the phenomenological world of the animal and its defamiliarization effects. At the time of their creation, there was no established framework of animal narratology, so both authors were predominantly read through an existentialist lens, although they are presented as examples of “*Umwelt* exploration” (Herman 2011). In Krasznahorkai’s collection, such processes are executed through the reader’s empathetic identification with a dog who serves as the narrator. Since this conceptual framework is not limited to literary texts, but can also be applied to non-textual media, the second part of the analysis will focus on *The Turin Horse*, a film where non-human consciousness is equated with human consciousness, immersing the audience in the strangeness of animal thought patterns.

THE ANIMAL AS NARRATOR IN *ANIMALINSIDE*

Animalinside is the title of Krasznahorkai’s multimedia collaboration with German painter Max Neumann, consisting of fourteen interconnected texts authored by Krasznahorkai, paired with Neumann’s drawings. Spanning around forty pages, its genre hovers in an indeterminate space between a novella, a short story collection, prose poems, and a pamphlet (Wesling 2019:26, Hopkin 2013). This collection of drawings and texts builds a non-anthropocentric psychological portrait of an animal, using narrative techniques that make it difficult for the reader to understand the narrator’s inner life, simultaneously creating conditions for the opposite effect: taking on the narrator’s

perspective and empathizing with the narrator's experiences.

The accompanying drawings depict black silhouettes of strong, robust canine (and occasionally human) figures, cramped in confined spaces. The shape of the creature has a distorted, unusual appearance, lacking front limbs and appearing to limp. Its depiction is incomplete in both mediums: portrayed as a negative in the drawings and as a dense stream of consciousness in the text. The animal's threatening appearance matches the threats articulated in the text, with the prevailing emotions of aggression and anger gradually intensifying: "each image/text threatens more gravely than the last" (Harris 2011).

The narration begins in the third person and quickly shifts to the first person which continues until the end of the text: "He wants to break free, attempts to stretch open the walls, but he has been tautened there by them(...)," "I want to break out, I want to stretch open the walls, but they have tautened me here (...)" (Krasznahorkai 2010:8, 9). This unexpected shift to homodiegetic narration signals to the reader that they are now in the realm of "animal autobiography," as the very first statement "I want" makes it clear that the narrative has shifted to a new center of consciousness, a non-human one. As Donald Wesling observes, "the animal is I and the humans are they and you" (Wesling 2019:28). This division between the human and non-human suggests to the reader that the threat is directed at them, i.e., at their species. The act of giving voice to an animal that cannot speak human language indicates that this is not a mimetic narrative, even though the text successfully immerses the reader in the animal's inner world. While in certain genres speaking animals are a product of convention, the language of this animal is markedly different from the anthropomorphic projections typical of fantasy or children's literature. The sentence construction deviates from reader expectations: long, meandering sentences separated by commas create a strange rhythm that many readers and critics describe as disorienting and hypnotic. George Szirtes, one of Krasznahorkai's translators, describes the effect of his style as a "slow lava flow of narrative." (Bahadur 2017). The whirlwind of unbroken sentences produces a rhythm that evokes a feeling of defamiliarization and transports, immerses the reader in a different world. This complex process of narrative transportation is emphasized by cognitive narratologists like David Herman with the concept of the "storyworld," which can be defined as the narrative's ability to create worlds, a potential that "catalyzes an imaginative relocation of readers to a new, often unfamiliar world and experience" (James 2015:15).

Since the text is composed of repetitive and contradictory statements reminiscent of Beckett, the subjective experience of the dog in Krasznahorkai's work does not function as much on the level of narrative content, as it does not aim to verbally describe its world. Rather, this is achieved more through the form of the text. According to critic Jose Esposito, "the book's power comes from how [Krasznahorkai] layers repeated words and phrases

into a sort of cumulative syntax," with their contradictions and unreliability indicating that it is more about a "formal fascination with language that goes far beyond a desire to tell a story" (Esposito 2011). Despite the contradictions in content that make the text difficult to interpret, immersion in the animal's inner world is made possible by the rhythmic style of presentation, as well as the homodiegetic narration. The fragmented narrative mimics the howling and barking of the animal, which is suggested in the drawings by the dog's semi-upright posture and its tilted stance towards the human figure. Occasionally, the text attempts to verbally evoke the *Umwelt* of the dog:

(...) my head bowed, pushing forward, I sniff at the ground, I'm looking for something, I'm pursuing a scent, but I've lost the scent, I can't smell it any more, then I look for the path, I go after the scent again, but then there's nothing again, it has drifted away, evaporated, but I just dig up the earth, I root around here and there, I have no goal, no plan of where I'm going or why (...) my little master, give me my little food-dish here, give me my dinner here, and I ask you kindly, don't do this again to me, and every evening when it's dinner time give me my little food-dish here, and put into it, I ask you kindly, my dinner, because when it is dinner-time I have to eat dinner, and every dinner-time of every day I have to eat dinner (...)
(Krasznahorkai 2010:24, 34)

Two behaviors characteristic of dogs are evident here: the first is sniffing, the dominant form how dogs perceive the environment, and the second is the excitement caused by the anticipation of dinner—a behavior recognizable to anyone who lives with or interacts with dogs.⁷ Descriptions of sniffing serve to illustrate the dog's distinctly olfactory experience of the world, emphasizing the fluctuations of scents and suggesting proximity to the ground, a consequence of the dog's anatomical features as a quadrupedal animal.⁸ Sensitivity to changes in routine is also highlighted; it is well-known that dogs, like many other animals sharing living spaces with humans, form habits and noticeably react to deviations from routine.

⁷ Donna Haraway distinguishes between domestic animals and pets, pointing out the speciesism inherent in the term "pet," for which she proposes the term "companion species" (Haraway 2003). In Croatian, this term can be translated as *životinje-sputnici* or, as Suzana Marjanić excellently translates it, *družbenici* (Marjanić 2024:320).

⁸ In her book *Inside of a Dog* (2009), Alexandra Horowitz explains that a dog's world is defined by what they can perceive (with highly developed senses of smell and hearing when compared to humans) and how they interact (using their mouths to manipulate objects, thus dividing the world into things that fit into their mouths and things that do not).

Furthermore, the sentence rhythm and contradictions in the statements simulate a different kind of consciousness and perception from what we are familiar with. For instance, in one section, the animal openly questions its own perception of time, which is unlike that of a human animal:

“(...) before me there is no past, after me there will be no need of the future, because there will be no future, because my existence is not measured by time, because that which exists in one moment still has not come, in the next moment, however, it is already there, the timeless – this I am, this I will be, who at once will just be there, right in front of you, and certain, right in front of you, yes, there I shall be at once from nothing (...)” (Krasznahorkai 2010:17)

Statements such as “my existence is not measured by time” and “timeless – this I am” emphasize the issue of time in the text which is not only expressed on a linguistic level but also through the rhythmic organization of the text, ultimately leading the reader to adopt a different perception of time. This suggests the impossibility of so-called mental time travel, or *chronesthesia*, which is often attributed to non-human animals as a trait that distinguishes them from human animals.

The fundamental narrative technique in Krasznahorkai’s opus is reduction, present on the level of dialogue, plot and character development, as well as character psychology. His characters are often stripped of intellectual and emotional capacities. In this instance, Krasznahorkai’s reduction is at its pinnacle, not only in the brevity of the text, but also through the displacement of human characters from the center of the story. When it comes to Krasznahorkai’s literary animals, domestic animals and pets are neither allegories nor stereotyped examples of their species, but rather *characters* who communicate (Wesling 2019:11). It is precisely this reduction of the human domain that creates an opportunity for the portrayal of non-human experience. However, the non-human does not exclude the human: “Thinking about animals we are drawn to de-center ourselves, because in their presence we can hardly any longer deny our evolutionary animal-inside” (Wesling 2019:ix).

THE ANIMAL AS A CHARACTER IN THE TURIN HORSE

The Turin Horse is, according to film theorist András Bálint Kovács, in many ways Tarr’s most radical film (Kovács 2013:145). Kovács notes that Tarr follows a specific method in the development of his films, the so-called “the permutation principle,” which involves a limited set of elements rearranged throughout the film to create a sense of cyclicity

and repetition (ibid.:119). This principle is evident in Tarr's entire body of work, where narrative slowness and minimalism, the absence of linear progression, the repetition of events, the minimal number of characters or incidents, and the lack of motivation for the human characters generate a feeling of endless repetition—all taken to the extreme in *The Turin Horse*. These characteristics are comparable to *Animalinside*, and despite the differences between textual and cinematic media, *The Turin Horse* presents an animal character rather than an animal narrator, playing a role equivalent to that of the human characters in the film. The effects in both examples are the same: They revolve around the interplay of defamiliarization and empathy, and the subversion of both human and non-human experientiality through manipulation of narrative time.

The film is shot in black and white, and the plot is reduced to a minimum: It depicts the daily life of a coachman and his daughter, who live a modest life on an isolated farm with a single horse. The film begins with a comment from an omniscient narrator, recounting the apocryphal story of Friedrich Nietzsche's final mental breakdown, from which he never recovered:

In Turin on the 3rd of January 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche steps out of the doorway of number six, Via Carlo Albert, perhaps to take a stroll, perhaps to go by the post office to collect his mail. Not far from him, the driver of a hansom cab is having trouble with a stubborn horse. Despite all his urging, the horse refuses to move, whereupon the driver – Giuseppe? Carlo? Ettore? – loses his patience and takes his whip to it. Nietzsche comes up to the throng and puts an end to the brutal scene caused by the driver, by this time foaming at the mouth with rage. For the solidly built and full-moustached gentleman suddenly jumps up to the cab and throws his arms around the horse's neck, sobbing. His landlord takes him home, he lies motionless and silent for two days on a divan until he mutters the obligatory last words "Mutter, ich bin dumm!" and lives for another ten years, silent and demented, under the care of his mother and sisters. We do not know what happened to the horse. (Tarr 2011)

The first scene of the film follows the final sentence of the quote above, showing a close-up of the harnessed horse, with the old coachman (János Derzsi) occasionally visible in the background as he drives the horse. The restless camera movement mirrors the horse's steps through a barren, windswept landscape in a shot lasting several minutes. The angle and perspective from which the horse is filmed, along with the obscuring of the human figure and the length of the shot itself, immediately suggest that the film is primarily telling the horse's story. However, as Kovács points out, this is not an attempt

at historical reconstruction, since the identity of the coachman is unknown. Instead, it presents “an apocalyptical vision of a meteorological, human and social catastrophe, a total collapse of the world following this incident” (Kovács 2013:146). The coachman and horse finally return to their dilapidated, isolated homestead, where the coachman’s daughter (Erika Bók) awaits them. The human characters quietly continue their daily routine, consisting of changing clothes, cooking, eating, and sleeping. The next morning, they try to harness the horse again, but it refuses to move and stops eating, marking the beginning of the film’s plot. From this point on, it becomes clear that all three characters are awaiting their inevitable demise. The horse is the first to falter, their well runs dry, and they make an unsuccessful attempt to leave the homestead, only to soon return without explanation: The camera lingers on the homestead as they slowly leave the frame, waiting motionlessly for their return. By the end of the film, the human characters also succumb, refusing to eat, and darkness falls in the middle of the day. The final moment of the film is marked by the extinguishing of the oil lamp, the only remaining source of light.

The significance of narrative time is suggested in several ways. Long takes depict the monotonous daily life of the human characters, identical to the routine of the horse: Their existence is reduced to sleeping, waking, eating, and resting in silence. The content of the film is subordinated to its form, as the plot is minimal, scenes are static, and there is almost no dialogue between the two human characters. Their rituals, such as dressing and eating, unfold in real time, demanding great effort from the viewers to maintain their concentration. However, the film’s slow pace also creates a kind of hypnotic effect, similar to that in Krasznahorkai’s collection. These techniques, on the one hand, de-automate the viewer’s perception and, at the same time, bring them closer to the rural and animal life, which is defined by slow temporal flow, repetitive actions, and basic physiological needs. In this way, the human characters and the non-human character are given equal status.

The absence of verbal communication is another crucial method of placing human and non-human animals in a continuum, rather than in an oppositional hierarchy where humans occupy the top. This is what David Herman refers to as “cross-species analogy”: “if anthropomorphism entails the imposition of human language on species that communicate otherwise, zoomorphism can entail the loss of language by the species assumed to be its rightful possessor,” thus, while anthropomorphism familiarizes the unknown (i.e., the non-human animal), zoomorphism relies on defamiliarizing the known — namely, the human animal — “thereby staging a different way of being in the world” (Herman 2011:176, 174).

Film theorist Matthew Flanagan notes that films with such stylistic and formal characteristics “[compel] us to retreat from a culture of speed, modify our expectations of filmic narration and physically attune to a more deliberate rhythm” (Flanagan 2011).

Considering Flanagan's argument about the effect of rhythm on the viewer, along with other formal features of *The Turin Horse*, which suggest that the film addresses the fate of the horse, it could be concluded that the viewer indeed experiences the flow of time characteristic of a non-human experience. In his text on animal focalization in literary texts, William Nelles posits a thesis about a continuum of approaches to representing animal consciousness, which can be applied to this film. At one end, "the narrator's subjectivity is nominally located within an animal filter, but skews incongruously from that premise through details inconsistent with cultural discourses about that animal. At the other extreme the narrating limits itself rigorously within the animal's natural and/or conventional sphere of interest and reference" (Nelles 2001:192). *The Turin Horse*, when all its specificities are taken into account — absence of human dialogue, minimal plot development, reduction of dramatic elements, depiction of routines and daily life focused on basic needs like eating and sleeping, long takes, and the limited number of cuts (just over thirty shots in a 146-minute film), its static nature, and so on — leans towards this latter extreme. The film's potential plot developments are consistently constrained by the interests of the animal, aiming to depict the "texture or content or shape of nonhuman thought" (ibid.).

Given these considerations, Tarr's filmography is often classified as slow cinema or contemplative cinema, a stylistic trend in contemporary filmmaking marked by the use of long takes and an absence of dialogue and music. This movement has emerged as a response to changes in the film-viewing experience, influenced by advancements in technology (Jaffe 2014; de Luca and Nuno Barradas 2015). One of the key characteristics of this style is the focus on the environment, often equated with human characters. This is particularly evident in *The Turin Horse*, where the human and non-human intertwines to the point that the distinction between them becomes nearly erased. In this context, Kovács points out that everything happening in the film is more of a "process of nature rather than the result of human action" (Kovács 2013:148). Tarr's interest in the environment and the non-human is excellently reflected in his use of long takes, taken to the extreme in *The Turin Horse*. These extended shots are interpreted differently by film theorists: while Scott Foundas believes they create an immersive effect, David Bordwell describes them as "observation from a rather detached standpoint" (cited in Kovács 2013:50). However, it is precisely these simultaneously immersive and defamiliarizing formal techniques that underline the potential for the viewer to immerse themselves in the experience of the non-human.

CONCLUSION

Literary texts, films, and other artistic media serve as a means to relate unknown experiences and make them more tangible to the reader/viewer/listener. Caracciolo notes that we seem to live in a time of “a remarkable convergence between the rise of interest in animal consciousness in several fields (from consciousness science to cognitive ethology) and literary attempts at capturing what it is like to be a nonhuman animal” (Caracciolo 2014:499). Scientific descriptions of animal consciousness and behavior, however, currently do not provide means for humans to simulate the experience of being a non-human animal, while narratives, according to numerous contemporary narratologists and cultural animal studies scholars, do have this potential.

Keeping in mind posthumanist and cultural animalistic critiques of the dualistic view of human and non-human, it is important to note that these relationships should be viewed as a continuum, rather than an absolute difference. Human and animal consciousness exist in a bio-evolutionary and cultural continuum, which means that humans share some level of experience with certain species of animals (such as mammals), enabling interspecies recognition and communication (Caracciolo 2014:497). These insights are owed to the sciences studying human-animal-environment relationships, while fiction can play a crucial role by offering an empathetic or imaginative way of engaging with animal experience.

Based on the demonstrated analysis, Krasznahorkai's text can be categorized as part of a body of literature that questions the anthropocentric paradigm as it “defamiliarizes readers' folk psychology by using a non-human, innate behavioral program as the trigger of the narrative dynamics” (Bernaerts et al. 2014:81). The readers of such texts do not observe the behavior of the animal from the outside, as in scientific observations, but are encouraged to accept its perspective, sharing with it the feeling of entrapment and the inability to articulate thoughts in human language. This provides a compelling attempt to simulate the immediate experience of the phenomenology of animals' lives, i.e. an imitation of their *Umwelt*. Literary theorist Donald Wesling highlighted the basic methods in Krasznahorkai's writing that can also be applied to Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, supporting this interpretation: reducing the scene to barren spaces and seasons, describing action in long sentences that span entire pages and paragraphs which are as long as chapters, hypertrophic description and nearly eliminating dialogue, and human characters limited in social scope, intelligence, and emotional range (Wesling 2014). These same techniques are evident in *The Turin Horse*, with long descriptions from literary media transformed into long takes and static, repetitive actions in film. Some critics note these parallels, such as Boyd Tonkin who states that Tarr's hypnotic shots are the visual equivalent of

Krasznahorkai's "spiraling sentences" (Tonkin 2018). Ultimately, both the text and the film deviate from conventional narrative frameworks used to depict non-human experience, producing defamiliarizing effects that simultaneously bring the reader closer to an unfamiliar world. These processes can prompt readers to reconsider notions of the human and non-human; told through an apocalyptic lens, they remind us that non-human animals are our companions in these uncertain times marked by the climate crisis.

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Ljudsko i ne-ljudsko u prozi Lászla Krasznahorkaija i na filmu Béle Tarra

Marijeta Bradić

László Krasznahorkai i Béla Tarr suvremeni su mađarski autori poznati po svojoj dugogodišnjoj suradnji. U zreloj fazi svojega redateljskoga rada (1988. – 2011.), Tarr je adaptirao nekoliko Krasznahorkaijevih romana (*Sotonski tango*, 1985. i *Melankolija otpora*, 1989.), a scenarij njegova posljednjega filma – *Torinski konj* (*A torinói ló*, 2011.) – napisao je upravo Krasznahorkai. Krasznahorkaijev rukopis u Tarrovim je filmovima primjetan na tematsko-motivskom i formalnom planu. Neka od najvažnijih obilježja njihovih suradničkih radova uključuju apokaliptični ton, spor protok vremena i brojni motivi životinja (npr. prikaz stada krava kojim se otvara *Sotonski tango*, preparirani kit kao središnji motiv *Werckmeisterovih harmonija* i konj kao lik *Torinskoga konja*). Ono po čemu se oba autora ističu jest, među ostalim, okupljanje oko ne-ljudskih subjekata, prije svega životinja. Slijedom navedenoga, fokus teksta bit će na njihovim dvama apokaliptičnim radovima – Krasznahorkaijevoj proznoj knjižici *UnutraJeŽivotinja* (2010) i Tarrovu *Torinskom konju* – počevši od pretpostavke da je kod Krasznahorkaija prisutna uporaba “životinjskoga pripovjedača”, a Tarr pokušava uprizoriti unutarnji život životinje (Bernaertes i dr. 2014). Narativni postupci u obama medijima proizvode iste učinke kod čitatelja/gledatelja, koji se zrcale u “dvostrukoj dijalektici”: suosjećanje s ne-ljudskim subjektom i očuđenje, odnosno iznevjeravanje pretpostavki i očekivanja o životinjskome subjektu s jedne strane, te iznevjeravanje ljudske “iskustvenosti” s druge strane (Bernaertes i dr. 2014; Fludernik 1996). Slijedom ovih pretpostavki, rad će se temeljiti na usporedbi narativnih postupaka u ovim različitim medijima, odnosno u navedenoj zbirci i filmu, koji proizvode iste učinke i u funkciji su iste ideje – preispitivanja antropocentričnih svjetonazora.

Ključne riječi: *László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr, neljudski pripovjedači, kognitivna naratologija, kulturna animalistika*



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